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## Distancing Techniques in Fassbinder's *Effi Briest*

Peter K. Tyson

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**Abstract** Fontane's ambiguity and complexity in his novel *Effi Briest* appealed to Fassbinder's love of intricate social relations. Fontane presents Effi mainly in a restrained neutral manner although it can be argued that the author's meta-voice adds some touches of subtle criticism. Fassbinder's approach to Effi in his film of the novel is more distanced, critical and ironic. Clearly influenced by Brecht's idea of "Verfremdung", Fassbinder uses an array of distancing techniques in his film: voice-over narration, fades to white, short episodic scenes, captions, various "framing" devices, cool mannered acting, etc., to prevent empathy and to allow the viewers to draw their own conclusions in a calm detached manner. Although less avant-garde, provocative and extreme than much of his other work, *Effi Briest* remains a difficult film which challenges the viewer. Fassbinder's film is radical more in terms of style than content—Effi fails to achieve her potential and cannot be considered a Brechtian heroine. Fassbinder has left us with a dense, richly layered modern masterpiece, far removed from undemanding Hollywood films with their easy empathy and escapism.

**Keywords** Fontane · Fassbinder · *Effi Briest* · "Verfremdung" · Brecht

Before discussing Fassbinder's film of *Effi Briest* (1974), it is first necessary to examine how Fontane presents his protagonist in his novel of 1895. Is Effi a sympathetic victim of her mother's personal frustrations and social aspirations, a

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naive victim neglected because of her husband's selfish political ambitions, isolated and vulnerable in an uninspiring environment, a young immature victim of a loveless mismatch with a pedantic older man of principles? Or is she a pampered, high-maintenance drama queen ("eine junge, verwöhnte Frau", Innstetten, 166)<sup>1</sup> who deserves her wretched fate for breaking society's rules?

Unlike an omniscient Thomas Mann-style narrator who constantly interferes in the action and passes judgement on the characters, Fontane, following nineteenth-century realist traditions, remains a cautious, restrained third-person narrator who keeps himself in the background. Walter Müller-Seidel finds Fassbinder even-handed with regard to the responsibility for Effi's downfall: "In diesem Punkt wahrte Fontane als Erzähler eine gleichsam 'parteipolitische Neutralität'. Er legt sich nicht fest und spricht keine Urteile aus."<sup>2</sup> Although characters do discuss and criticise each other, facts are allowed to speak for themselves and difficult issues are best avoided ("Das ist ein zu weites Feld", Briest, 267). Because of the mainly unspoken psychological reality of characters' inner lives and Fontane's great subtlety as a novelist, the reader has to deduce the novel's inner meaning amidst all the complexity. One reviewer writes: "Ambiguity is a hallmark of *Effi Briest* and is a major part of the appeal of Fontane's novel. Fontane refrains from making authorial pronouncements or assessments on his characters' actions and situations."<sup>3</sup>

Many readers will feel that Fontane has presented Effi sympathetically ("arme Effi", 264) and will identify with her fate—a wasteful but wonderfully poetic death! They will understand her forgiveness of Innstetten on her deathbed and her reconciliation with society as she accepts social "Ordnung". However, Woodford (2007) argues that we are distanced from Effi at the end by Fontane: "The meta-voice of the narrator surrounds the conventional heroine's death with too many indications of the meaninglessness of her suffering for the reader to assent to the moral design in the way that Effi does."<sup>4</sup> Although Effi is reconciled with society, the modern (liberated/feminist?) reader sees past the words on the page and does not accept this cosy ending. The modern reader remembers the injustice done to Effi, does not identify with her but is distanced from her and is able to challenge the sterile moribund society which has produced such resignation in Effi: "in her confessions to her mother, Effi reminds us of the wrongs committed against her. [...] for the reader her poetic death is interrupted by the recollection of the injustice done to Effi. The reader is surely inclined to disagree with Effi's sentiment that Innstetten's calculated punishment of her through the child was just [...]. Perhaps in the meta-voice of the narrator there are still resonances of that anger, resonances which enable the reader to challenge the society whose codes have produced such resignation."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> All references are to the Goldmann edition of *Effi Briest*.

<sup>2</sup> Müller-Seidel, "Nachwort" to Goldmann edition, 275.

<sup>3</sup> See Pena review.

<sup>4</sup> Woodford (2007, 97).

<sup>5</sup> Woodford (2007, 96).

Let's now consider the next question: how does Rainer Werner Fassbinder present Effi in his film—as a sympathetic, vulnerable heroine with whom the audience can easily identify emotionally or does he distance us from her so that, as a calm reflective audience in the spirit of Brecht, we are able to dispassionately draw our own conclusions about the society which sentenced Effi to such a shocking early grave?

In his fairly recent study of Fassbinder's work in the German theatre, Barnett (2005) argues against those critics who tend to exaggerate the influence of Antonin Artaud<sup>6</sup> on Fassbinder, portraying Fassbinder as “a sensual, irrationalist director, fascinated by the unsayable in performance”<sup>7</sup> while downplaying the importance of Brecht: “non-specialists have championed the Artaudian Fassbinder and dismissed a Brechtian influence.”<sup>8</sup> There are clear links between Fassbinder's work in the theatre and his films—the same actors and collaborators are used in both genres, plays are reworked as films, stylistic experiments are carried over, the films can have a theatrical quality, etc.—and there is also a clear influence of Brecht on Fassbinder's work on both stage and screen. Although finding Brecht too cold and abstract, too lacking in sensuality, Fassbinder himself did acknowledge the importance of Brecht's idea of “*Verfremdung*”.<sup>9</sup> Barnett's study of Fassbinder's work in the theatre throws up many Brechtian influences: the defamiliarisation of the normal, the de-individualisation of character, the materialist view of characters as dynamic products of social relationships and situations, the distanced acting, the episodic structures, the undermining of naturalistic language, the destruction of empathy and the provocation which makes the audience think and analyse.

In the context of his “oeuvre”, Fassbinder's *Effi Briest* is not that extreme or avant-garde. It tells a story chronologically, it can be described as a historical, black and white period piece based on a literary classic, the characters are recognizable as real human beings and, by Fassbinder's standards and at a superficial level, it seems relatively realistic. It is nowhere near some of his other work which is wildly avant-garde and scandalously provocative. *Preparadise Sorry Now* (1969) shocked audiences with its controversial subject matter (the English Moors Murders of 1963–65) and its free form (autonomous scenes can be staged in any order, with almost limitless permutations and without a temporal straitjacket); *Blut am Hals der Katze* (1971), another montage play, compelled the audience to generate the production's meaning through its radical exploration of language, its extreme formalism and symmetry, and through its shifting character types which replaced discrete identities—the spectators were forced to make sense themselves of the short rapid scenes of this difficult complex work which was met by a barrage of criticism; his *Der Müll, die Stadt und der Tod* (published 1976) caused the greatest scandal in

<sup>6</sup> Antonin Artaud (1896–1948) is associated with the “Theatre of Cruelty” which tried to shock spectators out of their complacency by forcing them to engage with a performance on an instinctive level. Artaud influenced Peter Brook's famous, groundbreaking production of *Marat/Sade* as well as The Living Theatre, the experimental American theatre company which was founded in 1947 and toured Europe in the 1960s.

<sup>7</sup> Barnett (2005, 5).

<sup>8</sup> Barnett (2005, 6).

<sup>9</sup> See Barnett (2005, 6–7).

post-war West German theatre by touching on many raw nerves in polite post-war West German society through its treatment of post-war politically correct philo-Semitism and the Nazi death camps together with its presentation of unrepentant Nazis and unsympathetic Jews.

Although less experimental and provocative than some of his other works, Fassbinder's *Effi Briest* has still proved difficult for many of its critics, especially non-specialists. One Australian reviewer writes: *Effi Briest* "certainly doesn't work in English. Over-long, slow-moving, emotionally flat and so verbally dense as to require the non-German speaker to almost continually read its sub-titles, it's a heavy slog [...] the story [...] is grist to Fassbinder's anti-bourgeois mill. As usual, however, the director's stylistic self-indulgence makes no concession to the audience."<sup>10</sup> Some American reviewers have also struggled with the film. Dave Kehr of the *Chicago Reader* (1/1/2000) criticises the "stifling mise-en-scene" and describes "the slow, deliberate pace" as "sometimes taxing"; Donald J. Levit (ReelTalk Movie Reviews, 19/6/2004) condemns the film as "ponderously top-heavy in its setting up and complication".<sup>11</sup> Christopher Null, who describes *Effi Briest* as an uncharacteristic departure from the body of Fassbinder's work, is equally dismissive: "Unfortunately, this is a Merchant-Ivory epic by way of *The Scarlet Letter*, and with Fassbinder's perverted sensibilities tugging at the hem of the film, we end up with an overblown mishmash of stodgy narration and long, unbroken shots that track endlessly on nothing of consequence. [...] Getting to the dramatic climax, though, takes nearly 2 h, and it's followed by 20 more minutes of weeping."<sup>12</sup> As these reviews show, although *Effi Briest* is not as extreme or as provocative or as avant-garde as some of Fassbinder's other works,<sup>13</sup> it remains a challenging film and this challenge arises from Fassbinder's stylistic treatment of Fontane's novel—superficially we may have a black and white period piece, but the treatment has proved too radical and uncompromising for many critics.

For his film, Fassbinder uses a number of colleagues from his theatre productions: Hanna Schygulla (*Effi*), Ulli Lommel (*Crampas*), Ursula Strätz (*Roswitha*), Irm Hermann (*Johanna*), Karlheinz Böhm (*Wöllersdorf*) and Kurt Raab (*Art Direction*) as well as himself (narrator) and his mother Lilo Pempeit (*Luise von Briest*). He opens with the title *Fontane Effi Briest*, followed by a thirty-one word sub-title<sup>14</sup> which is hyphenated and compressed into one narrow, black on white column. J. Clark sees this "polemical" / "playful in-your-face" sub-title as reinforcing "the themes of repression [...] and brokenness".<sup>15</sup>

Fassbinder makes his intentions clear straightaway with an array of distancing techniques. He uses himself as a voice-over narrator who reads directly from

<sup>10</sup> Anonymous reviewer, see cinephilia website.

<sup>11</sup> See Rotten Tomatoes website for both reviews.

<sup>12</sup> See Null review.

<sup>13</sup> J. Clark calls Fassbinder's *Effi Briest* "one of his most accessible films", see website.

<sup>14</sup> The full title runs *Fontane Effi Briest oder Viele, die eine Ahnung haben von ihren Möglichkeiten und ihren Bedürfnissen und dennoch das herrschende System in ihrem Kopf akzeptieren durch ihre Taten und es somit festigen und durchaus bestätigen.*

<sup>15</sup> See J. Clark review.

Fontane's text and thus creates immediately a layer of distance between the viewer and the action. For example, in the betrothal scene, we watch the characters who remain mute while Fassbinder just reads from the novel.<sup>16</sup> Discrepancies between what we see and what we hear can also be unsettling—the narrator tells us that Effi, after a scary night with little sleep, threw herself on Innstetten while all we observe are the servants in the kitchen. Thus, a dramatic moment takes place off-screen and is defused, only to be replaced by everyday banality. This use of “Erzählung” is completely in accordance with Brecht's “episches Theater”<sup>17</sup>:

*Dramatische Form des Theaters*

handelnd  
verwickelt den Zuschauer in  
eine Bühnenaktion  
verbraucht seine Aktivität  
ermöglicht ihm Gefühle

*Epische Form des Theaters*

erzählend  
macht den Zuschauer zum  
Betrachter, aber  
weckt seine Aktivität  
erzwingt von ihm  
Entscheidungen

This use of narration creates distance and prevents identification with the characters on screen. When Effi is tormented by guilt and worry that her adultery will be exposed, Fassbinder does not allow Schygulla to present a scene of great passion but instead she just walks along calmly with her umbrella while Fassbinder reads from the novel. The viewers are prevented from becoming too emotionally involved with the action and by remaining calm and detached are able to make rational decisions about what they see.

Distance is also created by the Brechtian captions which break up the action and emphasize key points or pass ironic comments. The captions are also reminiscent of silent films and the Gothic script adds to the sense of period. Particularly effective is the distance created by the use of dubbing. Some of the minor characters are dubbed with a voice different than that of the actor portraying them: “Fast alle Darsteller (ausser den drei von Hanna Schygulla, Wolfgang Schenck und Karlheinz Böhm gespielten Hauptrollen) wurden von anderen Schauspielern synchronisiert, um einen zusätzlichen Verfremdungseffekt zu erzielen. Unter den Synchronstimmen sind Kurt Raab (für Hark Bohm), Margit Carstensen (für Irm Hermann), Arnold Marquis (für Herbert Steinmetz).”<sup>18</sup> Effi Annie also seems to speak with an adult voice.

Instead of using fades to black, Fassbinder divides his scenes through fades to white. In line with epic theatre, the film has an episodic structure as Fassbinder cuts

<sup>16</sup> Pott (2002) sees this scene as anticipating Effi's downfall: “In *Fontane Effi Briest* gibt es eine analoge Szene, die bereits zu Anfang des Films passiert. Effi wird die Ehe mit Innstetten als wirtschaftlicher und sozialer Aufstieg versprochen. Im Gegensatz zu dieser Ankündigung ihrer ehrgeizigen Mutter läuft sie in ihrem weissen Kleid die Treppe hinunter, auf Innstetten zu. Die Symbolik der Treppenbewegung antizipiert ihr Scheitern.”, 66.

<sup>17</sup> Brecht (1969, 19).

<sup>18</sup> See wikipedia website.

down Fontane's long novel to a succession of short scenes.<sup>19</sup> A smooth narrative flow which would lull the viewer into a cosy spirit of empathy is disrupted by the abrupt white-outs which help create Brecht's thinking observer. This effect is deliberate as Fassbinder himself remarks: "Well, fades to black usually manipulate feelings or time, whereas fades to white wake you up, because seeing just whiteness on the screen gives you a little jolt and keeps you awake, not in the sense that you might have gone to sleep, but mentally alert. But these fades to white are used the way they are in a book when you turn the page or when a new chapter begins, and the blank space creates a break. Simply so it won't have the smooth progression that most movies have."<sup>20</sup>

The fades to white also have a second function which Fassbinder hints at in this quote—they are like the pages of a book and Fassbinder was trying to recreate the reading process. When we read a novel, we each imagine the characters, settings, events, etc. in different ways. Films, however, do not usually have the same infinite possibilities as a novel. When a director makes a film, usually only one reading is offered, the director's. This is why films of a book often disappoint—the director's one reading cannot match the expectations of all the readers who interpret the novel in so many different ways. Fassbinder was therefore trying to overcome the limitations of film adaptations in order to restore some creativity to the viewer: "To show the narrative on film is like the author telling a story, but there's a difference. When one reads a book, one creates—as a reader—one's own images, but when a story is told on screen in pictures, then it is concrete and really 'complete'. One is not creative as a member of a film audience, and it was this passivity that I tried to counter in *Effi Briest*. I would prefer people to 'read' the film. It's a film which one cannot simply experience, and which doesn't attack the audience... one has to read it. That's the most significant thing about the film."<sup>21</sup>

The opening shot, after the credits, is typical of Fassbinder's visual intentions. He does not plunge directly into the action nor does he present an immediate realistic slice of life. "Framing" is one of his key artistic and visual principles in this film. The view of the imposing sunlit Briest family home is constricted by trees, shadows and darkness which form a border and from the beginning evoke a feeling of foreboding. Throughout the film, there are numerous framing devices: on the journey to Effi's new home in the petty provincial town of Kessin on the Baltic coast in north Germany the carriage is hemmed in first by trees and then by two narrow rows of houses; Effi is constantly framed by window panes, banisters, doorways, chairs and trees; she is squeezed between statues and gravestones; a lace curtain separates her from her husband who is framed by a grille; the view of the

<sup>19</sup> "Jede Szene für sich/Montage/in Kurven/Sprünge" instead of "Eine Szene für die andere/Wachstum/Geschehen linear/evolutionäre Zwangsläufigkeit", Brecht (1969, 20).

<sup>20</sup> Fassbinder, quoted by Vicari, see website.

<sup>21</sup> Fassbinder, quoted on kirjasto website. Cf. also: "Statt eine Illusion aufzubauen, dekonstruiert er diese durch eine formal ästhetische Vermittlungsweise. Eine vorlesende Off-Stimme, Weissblenden, Inserts, Einblendungen von Schrift etc. schaffen Analogien zum Leseprozess" and Wolf Donner, *Die Zeit*, 5 July 1974 "Jedes Wort, im Dialog und im Kommentar, der den Dialog aufnimmt, weiterführt, der Handlung vorgeht oder eine Dialektik zum Bild entwickelt, steht bei Fontane: keine Literaturverfilmung, sondern ein Film als Lektüre; man sieht und hört und liest einen Roman." For both quotes, see wikipedia website.

burial scene is closed in by curtains, etc. This “framing” has at least two functions. Firstly, it symbolises how Effi's youthful wildness and fantasy are stifled and repressed by her constricting upper-class marriage and claustrophobic north German environment—the imagery conveys the impression that she is trapped and caged.<sup>22</sup> Secondly, we have another example of “*Verfremdung*”. Just as Brecht destroys his audience's identification and reminds his spectators that they are sitting in a theatre watching a play, Fassbinder too destroys the illusion and makes the viewers aware that they are watching a film, a carefully composed piece of art. We have a series of static tableaux, like a series of framed paintings in an art gallery. Fassbinder does not immerse us directly in real life but presents a meticulously crafted, extremely artificial artistic creation. The “framing” forms another barrier between the viewer and the action, thus preventing empathy. Fassbinder is particularly fond of mirrors—they frame the characters and create distance through the clever use of reflections but they also allude to the “ghost” theme (the story of the Chinaman) as reflections “talk” to each other.

As we have already noted, Fassbinder often used in his films actors who had appeared in his theatrical productions and were familiar with his methods. The acting in *Effi Briest* is mainly underplayed—very cool and detached. Characters speak in a flat, neutral, unemotional manner. Many of the scenes are posed, artificial and stylised. Characters talk past each other, characters speak to mirror reflections, reflections talk to each other, characters address other characters off-camera, sometimes we just have talking heads framed by a white background—all of this is non-naturalistic and disconcerting. The lack of communication and emotion makes it difficult for the viewers to empathise with the characters. As already mentioned above, the use of different voices for some of the minor parts also creates distance. The abundance of statues proves symbolic—although they add to the affluent period atmosphere, they also symbolise the mannered stiffness of the main characters. It would appear that Fassbinder has been influenced by Brecht's actors who prevented identification by distancing themselves from the parts they were playing: “die Schauspieler vollzogen die Verwandlung nicht vollständig, sondern hielten Abstand zu der von ihnen dargestellten Figur, ja forderten deutlich zur Kritik auf.”<sup>23</sup> Hanna Schygulla, who appeared in many of Fassbinder's theatre productions and films, gives a restrained muted performance as Effi.<sup>24</sup> The main criticism of the film was “the flatness of its emotional landscape” which creates “the unbearable sight of a

<sup>22</sup> Pott (2002) writes: „Fassbinders Liebesdarstellungen sind mit einem Eingesperrtsein zu umschreiben. Es ist ein Eingesperrtsein in eine Ordnung. Fassbinder wählt Gitter, hinter die er die Liebe verbannt, in *Die Ehe der Maria Braun* verdoppelt er sogar die Gitter. In manchen Filmen, wie in *Fontane Effi Briest* (1972/74) und in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1979/80), hat er das Motiv des Vogelkäfigs zur Verdeutlichung der ‘eingesperrten Liebe’ genommen.“, 41–42.

<sup>23</sup> Brecht (1969, 63)

<sup>24</sup> According to Ulli Lommel, who played Crampas and worked on sixteen productions with Fassbinder, relations between Schygulla, Lommel and Fassbinder were strained during the making of the film: “Hanna and I were both at odds with Fassbinder at the time of shooting, which seemed to go on forever and ever (over a year). There was never any money and even though we felt it was going to be a masterpiece, it became more and more difficult to live with Fassbinder's mood swings which had, by this time, become quite extreme”, see Lommel website. Schygulla's work with Fassbinder was characterised by disagreements and after a fall-out during the making of *Effi Briest* (she found the role too constricting),



film suffocating by its own rigidity”<sup>25</sup> and the fact that “none of the actors here makes enough of an impression to make you care about them”, leaving us with a film which is “cold and detached”.<sup>26</sup> However, for Brecht, “cold” acting is not necessarily a failing. Describing the “Verfremdungseffekte” of Chinese actors, he writes: “Dem westlichen Schauspieler kommt das Spiel der chinesischen Artisten vielfach kalt vor. Nicht als ob das chinesische Theater auf die Darstellung von Gefühlen verzichtete! Der Artist stellt Vorgänge von grosser Leidenschaftlichkeit dar, aber dabei bleibt sein Vortrag ohne Hitzigkeit. [...] Der Artist zeigt: dieser Mensch ist ausser sich, und er deutet die äusseren Zeichen dafür an. [...] Die Durchkältung kommt daher, dass der Schauspieler sich in der erwähnten Art von der Figur, die er darstellt, distanziiert. Er hütet sich, ihre Empfindungen zu denen der Zuschauer zu machen.”<sup>27</sup>

In conclusion, Fontane presents Effi mainly in a restrained neutral style with, possibly, some subtle critical touches. In contrast, Fassbinder, as we have seen, distances us from Effi with a vast assortment of techniques. His approach is more distanced, critical and ironic. Although his film is more accessible than much of his other work, Fassbinder’s *Effi Briest* is still too uncomfortable and demanding for many viewers and, although superficially a black and white period piece, it proves, as Cannon concludes, “hardly a film at all in the traditional sense”.<sup>28</sup> Through his distancing and stylisation, Fassbinder hinders cinematic identification and creates Brecht’s detached, thinking observer who weighs up rationally the events depicted on screen.

What about the meaning—has Fassbinder managed to create a Brechtian heroine? Brecht writes: “Das Interesse des epischen Theaters ist also ein eminent praktisches. Das menschliche Verhalten wird als veränderlich gezeigt, der Mensch als abhängig von gewissen ökonomisch-politischen Verhältnissen und zugleich als fähig, sie zu verändern.”<sup>29</sup> Effi is certainly dependent on socio-economic conditions (when she has “fallen”, she still needs the financial support of her parents); she takes after her mother and is socially ambitious, only wanting an appropriate aristocratic husband with good prospects. She is a commodity who can be traded to a much older rising political star in a loveless<sup>30</sup> mismatch: “Effi never was anything but property—property that changes hands”.<sup>31</sup> Effi does have a moment of insight,

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Footnote 24 continued

she did not work with him again for 5 years—see Hodgkiss article. Irm Hermann, who appeared in many of Fassbinder’s films and theatre productions, was also treated badly by Fassbinder for many years.

<sup>25</sup> See Cannon review.

<sup>26</sup> See Null review.

<sup>27</sup> Brecht (1969, 78).

<sup>28</sup> See Cannon review.

<sup>29</sup> Brecht (1969, 242).

<sup>30</sup> Fassbinder is even cynical about “love” which he considers a means of keeping people in check—“das beste, hinterhältigste und wirksamste Instrument gesellschaftlicher Unterdrückung”, quoted in Pott (2002, 178).

<sup>31</sup> See Grunes review. Personally, I do not think that Fassbinder brings out the materialist underpinning of human behaviour as much as in some of his other films like, for example, *Die Ehe der Maria Braun* (1978) or *Lola* (1981).

a moment of Brechtian anger after meeting Annie, when she is disgusted by Innstetten's transformation of her daughter into a performing parrot and his pedantic, petty and cruel pursuit of "Ehre, Ehre, Ehre". This scene is effective in the film because for once Fassbinder does not narrate over Schygulla but allows her to break out of her emotional straitjacket and to show a few moments of passion, although she is still distanced by a wooden frame and this anger does not last as it is replaced in the end by forgiveness and reconciliation. As Fassbinder's sub-title implies, Effi has the potential to fulfil her possibilities and to change the world but she proves a disappointment and definitely not a Brechtian heroine because, by failing to achieve her potential<sup>32</sup> and by forgiving Innstetten, she is merely accepting and reinforcing the repressive sterile society which has destroyed her.<sup>33</sup> Fassbinder's *Effi Briest* is therefore radical, but more in terms of style rather than content.<sup>34</sup> Fontane's ambiguity and complexity definitely suited Fassbinder who has produced an intense, richly layered masterpiece<sup>35</sup> far removed from undemanding Hollywood films with their easy empathy and escapism. According to Lommel, Fassbinder, before his sudden early death, was planning to ruffle a few feathers in Hollywood: "Art is about danger, not playing it safe. And he was willing to pay the price. Shortly before his death he had plans to go to Hollywood, a place where almost everyone plays it safe. I often wonder whether or not he would've been able to shake up this dull and conforming place, this corporate snake pit, just a little bit..."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Effi herself remarks in the novel: „Es ist komisch, aber ich kann eigentlich von vielem in meinem Leben sagen 'beinah'." (253). Fassbinder uses this same quote for one of his captions in the film which indicates its importance to him.

<sup>33</sup> For Renny Harrigan, however, the ending marks a victory for Effi: "Fassbinder, on the other hand, uses Fontane's narrative to question and criticize the events. Effi's resignation cannot in any way be construed as acceptance, for it contains within it Effi's moral superiority and implicit criticism of the apparent victor.", see Harrigan article.

<sup>34</sup> Aitken (2001) argues that Fassbinder goes beyond Brecht by blending Brechtian alienation with Sirkian melodrama: "Fassbinder combined Brechtian alienation devices with melodramatic techniques derived from Sirk to make films which are often, and sometimes contradictorily, both affective and distancing. Fassbinder adopted this approach because he wanted to make his audience feel, as well as think, and went so far as to argue that he had 'gone further' than Brecht in achieving such a synthesis.", 150. The 1970 Munich film retrospective dedicated to the German émigré director Douglas Sirk (1900–1987, born Hans Detlef Sierck) had greatly influenced Fassbinder. I do not believe that Fassbinder achieves this synthesis in *Effi Briest*.

<sup>35</sup> I think the following Brecht quote also applies to Fassbinder's film: "Das epische Theater ist hoch artistisches Theater mit komplizierten Inhalten und weiter sozialer Zielsetzung", Brecht, 105.

<sup>36</sup> See Lommel website. After 10 years with Fassbinder, Lommel moved to New York to work with Andy Warhol before settling in 1980 in Hollywood which he is now trying to shake up by churning out direct to DVD horror movies for the "Hollywood House of Horror"!

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